THE FATE OF MANUSCRIPTS SUBMITTED TO THE *EAST AFRICAN ORTHOPAEDIC JOURNAL*

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ABSTRACT

Background: The *East African Orthopaedic Journal* (EAOJ) has been in existence since 2007. It accepts manuscripts in orthopaedic surgery and allied basic sciences. Manuscripts submitted are subjected to a peer-review process before publication. Not all manuscripts submitted to scientific journals ultimately get published, with some rejected due to various reasons. Manuscripts are mainly rejected due to scientific reasons like being poorly written, poor methodology or not adding to new knowledge.
Objective: This study sought to determine the fate of manuscripts submitted to the *EAOJ* since inception to August 2020.
Design: This was a retrospective review of all manuscripts submitted to the *EAOJ*.
Methods: The fate of manuscripts was determined as either accepted for publication or rejected. Reasons for rejection of manuscripts was also sought.
Results: A total of 160 manuscripts were submitted to the journal between the year 2012 and August 2020. Most of the manuscripts were from African countries. A total of 126 manuscripts were published with 10 being rejected, giving a publication and rejection rate of 79% and 6.25% respectively. Manuscripts withdrawn by authors were 8, while 16 manuscripts were still "pending" as the authors had not responded to the comments by the reviewers. Main reasons for rejection were manuscripts being poorly written or not adding any new knowledge.
Conclusions: The *EAOJ* has high publication rates for manuscripts submitted to it. Manuscripts were mainly rejected due to being poorly written or not adding any new knowledge.

Key words: Manuscripts, Submission, Rejection, Rejection rate, Publication rate

INTRODUCTION

The *East African Orthopaedic Journal (EAOJ)*, the official journal of the Kenya Orthopaedic Association, has been in existence since 2007, when the first issue was published. Since then, it has been published biannually, covering all specialties of orthopaedic surgery and basic sciences related to trauma and orthopaedic surgery. No charges are levied for publication in the journal. The journal accepts manuscripts from authors from all over the world. The articles are then subjected to a peer review process and a decision on publication is arrived at. Previous studies have shown that not all manuscripts submitted to a medical journal are published (1,2). Studies that have a high methodological quality and high level of evidence tend to be more accepted for publication in prestigious journals (3). Some studies have shown that articles that report positive outcomes or "statistical significance" or report new treatments also tend to get published preferentially (4,5). Some authors, however, have reported that there are some non-scientific reasons associated with either acceptance or rejection of a manuscript, like gender of the corresponding author, whether the study was done in the same country of the journal, disclosure of conflict of interest, commercial funding or the number of prior publications by the corresponding author (3,4,6). There is currently no published data on the fate of manuscripts submitted to the *EAOJ*. This study sought to find out the number of manuscripts submitted to the journal and the number of those rejected and possible reasons for rejection.

Objective: To determine the acceptance and rejection rates of manuscripts submitted to the *East African Orthopaedic* journal since inception and reasons for rejections.

Primary outcomes: Number of manuscripts submitted since inception of the *EAOJ*, number of manuscripts rejected and if possible, the reasons for rejection.

Methodology: A review of all manuscripts submitted to *EAOJ* since inception was done after obtaining consent of the Editor-in-Chief.

Inclusion criteria: All manuscripts submitted to the *EAOJ* since inception.

Exclusion criteria: Manuscripts for which all the required information was not available.

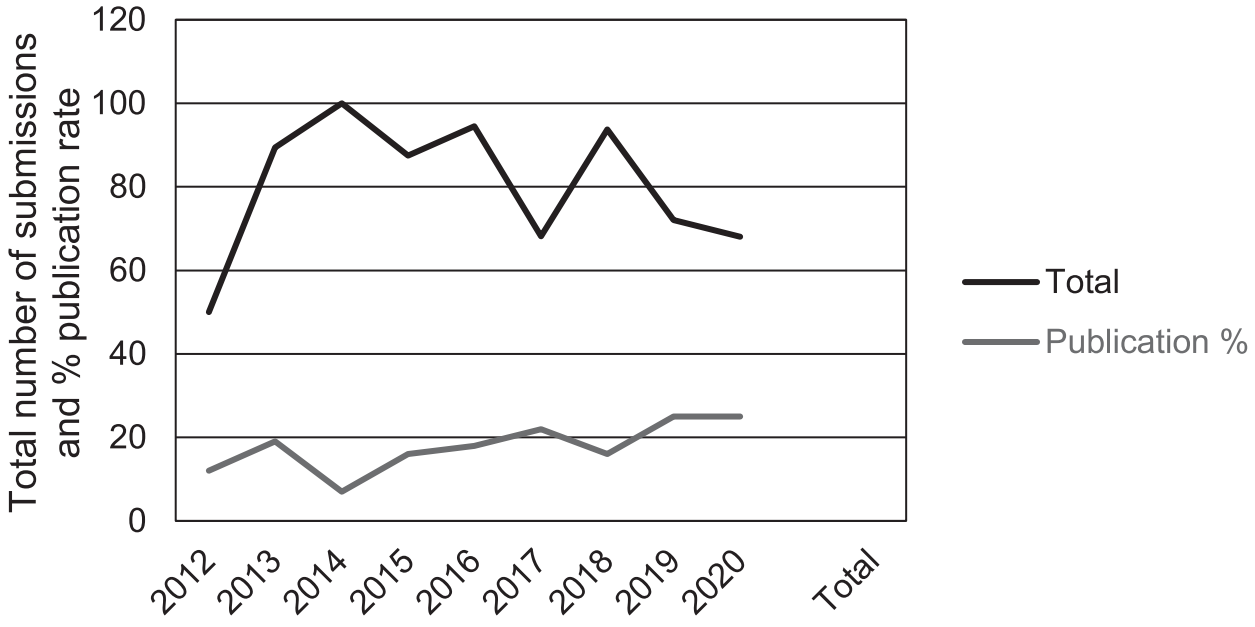
Data extraction: The following data was extracted from the database of manuscripts submitted to the journal: number of manuscripts submitted, accepted, or rejected and where possible reasons for rejection and country of origin of the manuscripts.

Data analysis: A narrative synthesis is presented summarizing the number of articles submitted to the journal over time. Analysis was also made of the number of rejected articles and possible reasons for rejection.

RESULTS

Data available was from the year 2012 to 2020. Between the year 2012 to August 2020, a total of 160 manuscripts had been submitted to the journal, with the journal receiving an average of 18 manuscripts per year. The number of manuscripts submitted increased from 12 in 2012 to 25 in the years 2019 and 2020 representing a more than 100% increase in numbers of submissions. The trend in submission numbers and publication rates is shown in Figure 1 .

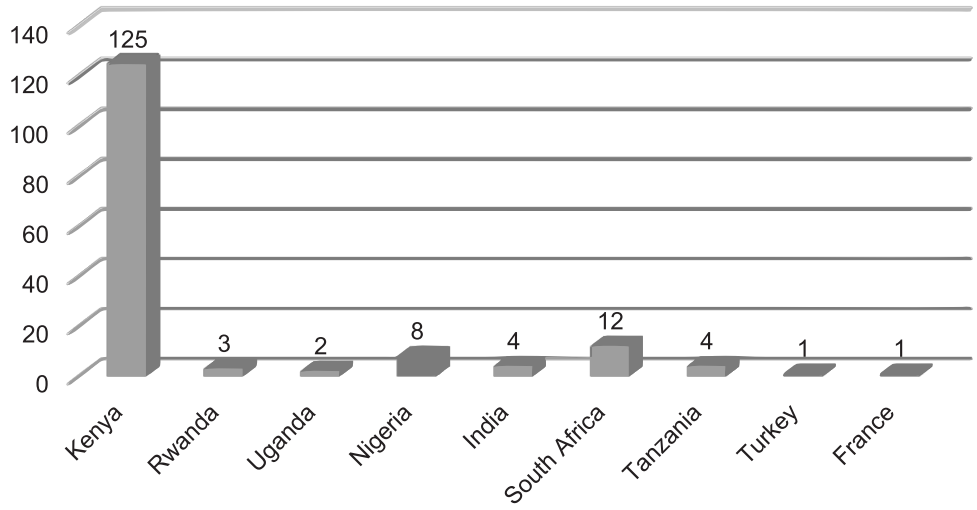
Figure 1
Submission and publication rates



Most of the manuscripts were from Kenya, contributing 78% of the manuscripts received. Manuscripts were also received from African countries like Rwanda, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa. India, Turkey, and France formed the countries outside Africa from which manuscripts were received. Manuscripts from South Africa and Nigeria contributed 7% and 5% respectively of the total manuscripts submitted. This is shown in Figure 2

Figure 2

Country of origin of manuscripts



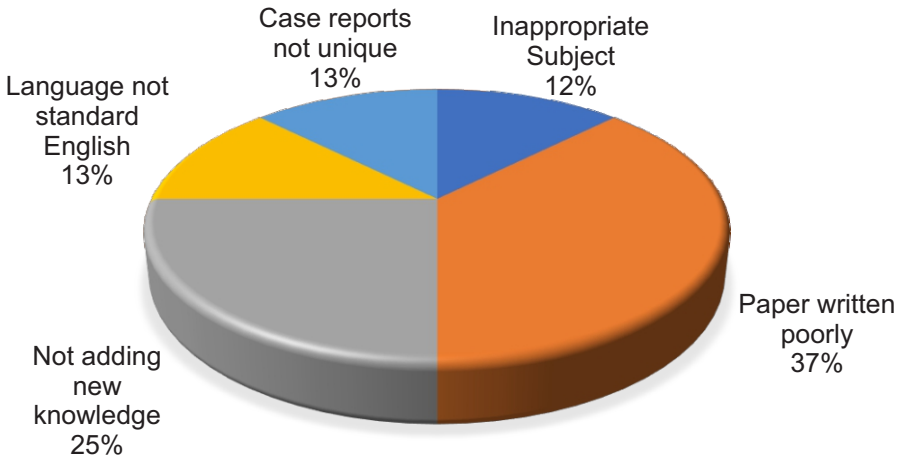
From the total submissions, 126 manuscripts were published, giving a total publication rate of 79%. Of the manuscripts not published, 10 were rejected, giving a rejection rate of 6.25%, 8 were withdrawn by the authors and 16 were "pending", whose authors had not responded to reviewer comments. The publication rate has shown a decline from a high of 100% in 2014 to 68% in June 2020.

Reasons for rejection were available for 8 manuscripts, out of which manuscripts from Kenya comprised 50%, with the rest originating from other countries. Some of the reasons given for rejection were:

i. Subject of the paper not suitable for the journal.
ii. Manuscripts poorly written with unclear methodology, poor or unclear study design, poorly presented results, and unfocused discussions.
iii. Manuscripts not adding new knowledge to what is already known.
iv. Manuscripts not written in standard medical English language.
v. Case reports that were not unique.

Figure 3 shows the contribution of the various factors to rejected manuscripts.

Figure 3
Reasons for rejection of manuscripts



DISCUSSION

In the years for which records were available, the average acceptance rate for publication in the *East African Orthopaedic Journal (EAOJ)* was 79%, higher than reported for some journals. Okike *et al*. (3) reported a 21.7% acceptance rate for manuscripts submitted to the *American Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery (3)*. A prospective cohort study of manuscripts submitted to the *British Medical Journal*, *(BMJ)* The *Lancet* (*UK*) and *Annals of Internal of Medicine (US)* found that only 6% of the manuscripts were accepted, with 70% rejected outright and 24% rejected after peer review (1). A study from the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* showed a manuscript rejection rate of between 26.7% to 72.1% (7), with similar figures of 22.6% to 73.4% rejection rates also reported for manuscripts submitted to the *American Journal of Roentgenology* (8). The high acceptance and low rejection rates of the *EAOJ* could be because it is still a relatively young journal, the first issue having been published in 2007. The number of articles received for consideration for publication is thus low, with only 12 manuscripts received in 2012. The number of submissions however has increased over time. This could be due to increase in the membership and activities of the Kenya Orthopaedic Association, and more orthopaedic surgeons in training and qualifying from the various training institutions like universities and the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (9,10). More established journals, which have been in existence much longer receive more manuscripts, as shown in the study by Lynch *et al.* (6) on the *BMJ*, the *Lancet* (*UK*) and *Annals of Internal Medicine* where each journal received an average of 369 manuscripts over a 4 month period.

Previous studies have found that the most common reasons for rejection of manuscripts were lack of novelty or lack of new or useful knowledge, poor methodology, unscientific writing, subject outside scope of the journal and weak study rationale (7,8,11). Similar reasons were found in the current study, with poorly written manuscripts contributing 37% and lack of novelty contributing 25% of the rejected manuscripts while case reports that were not unique contributed to 13% of the rejected manuscripts in the current study. Language barrier has been cited in other studies as a reason for rejection especially where the language is poorly written or unintelligible (8). In the present study, one manuscript was rejected as the language was poorly written, with the reviewer opining it suitable to a French journal.

In some studies, nationality of the journal and the nation of origin of the manuscripts have been found to be significantly associated with the likelihood of publication (12,14). In the current study, most of the manuscripts submitted, 78%, were from Kenya, with other countries contributing 22%. A correlation between the countries of origin and publication was however not possible as the data available did not capture the country of origin of all articles that were published. Non-scientific reasons associated with acceptance for publication have been found in other studies. These include conflict-of-interest disclosure involving non-profit entities, prior publications by the corresponding author in prestigious journals (3). It was not possible to determine these factors in the current study, due to the limited data available.

The current study has several limitations. Data available was only from the year 2012, thus missing out data from 2007 when the journal was first published. Another limitation of the study is its retrospective nature, with possibility of incomplete and missed data even in the years data was availed. The journal has no central platform for tracking submissions and a reviewer dashboard, with submissions and peer reviews directly emailed to the publishers.

CONCLUSIONS

The *East African Orthopaedic Journal* has a high acceptance rate for articles submitted for publication. Most manuscripts submitted to the journal come from Kenya, with South Africa and Nigeria contributing most articles from Africa. Reasons for rejection of manuscripts were mainly scientific and mirrored the reasons for rejection in other journals.

RECOMMENDATION

The *East African Orthopaedic Journal* should introduce a platform for submission, review and tracking of manuscripts submitted to the journal. This will enable ease of tracking and audit of manuscripts submitted to the journal.

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